

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
WESTERN DISTRICT OF LOUISIANA
MONROE DIVISION

SHAWN BATISTE
LA. DOC #365448
VS.

CIVIL ACTION NO. 09-0674

SECTION P

CHIEF JUDGE JAMES

WARDEN CHAD LEE

MAGISTRATE JUDGE HAYES

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Pro se plaintiff Shawn Batiste, proceeding *in forma pauperis*, filed the instant civil rights complaint pursuant to 42 U.S.C. §1983 on April 21, 2009. Plaintiff is an inmate in the custody of Louisiana's Department of Public Safety and Corrections (LDOC). He is incarcerated at the Madison Parish Corrections Center (MPCC), Tallulah, Louisiana; however, he complains that items of his personal property were lost when he transferred to that facility from the Franklin Parish Detention Center (FPDC) on September 29, 2008. He sues FPDC Warden Chad Lee and prays for the return of his lost property and compensation for stress and mental anguish. This matter has been referred to the undersigned for review, report, and recommendation in accordance with the provisions of 28 U.S.C. §636 and the standing orders of the Court. For the following reasons it is recommended that the complaint be **DISMISSED WITH PREJUDICE**.

Background

_____ Plaintiff is an inmate in the custody of the LDOC. On September 29, 2008, he was transferred from FPDC to the MPCC. Upon leaving the former facility he requested the return of his personal belongings which included identification information, a cassette tape and headphones and photographs of his family and friends. His request was refused and he was ordered into the transport van. He was ordered to be quiet and threatened with physical harm.

Plaintiff prays for the return of his property and compensatory damages of \$150,000 for the “stress and mental anguish” he has endured as a result of this incident.

Law and Analysis

1. Screening

When a prisoner sues an officer or employee of a governmental entity pursuant to 42 U.S.C. §1983, the court is obliged to evaluate the complaint and dismiss it without service of process, if it is frivolous, malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted, or seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C.1915A; 28 U.S.C.1915(e)(2). *Ali v. Higgs*, 892 F.2d 438, 440 (5th Cir.1990).

A claim is frivolous if it lacks an arguable basis in law or in fact. *Booker v. Koonce*, 2 F.3d 114, 115 (5th Cir.1993); see *Denton v. Hernandez*, 504 U.S. 25, 112 S.Ct. 1728, 1733, 118 L.Ed.2d 340 (1992). A civil rights complaint fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted if it appears that no relief could be granted under any set of facts that could be proven consistent with the allegations of the complaint. Of course, in making this determination, the court must assume that all of the plaintiff’s factual allegations are true. *Bradley v. Puckett*, 157 F.3d 1022, 1025 (5th Cir.1998).

A hearing need not be conducted for every *pro se* complaint. *Wilson v. Barrientos*, 926 F.2d 480, 483 n. 4 (5th Cir.1991). A district court may dismiss a prisoner’s civil rights complaint as frivolous based upon the complaint and exhibits alone. *Green v. McKaskle*, 788 F.2d 1116, 1120 (5th Cir.1986).

District courts must construe *in forma pauperis* complaints liberally, but they are given broad discretion in determining when such complaints are frivolous. *Macias v. Raul A. (Unknown) Badge No. 153*, 23 F.3d 94, 97 (5th Cir.1994).

A civil rights plaintiff must support his claims with specific facts demonstrating a constitutional deprivation and may not simply rely on conclusory allegations. *Schultea v. Wood*, 47 F.3d 1427, 1433 (5th Cir.1995). Furthermore, a district court is bound by the allegations in a plaintiff's complaint and is "not free to speculate that the plaintiff 'might' be able to state a claim if given yet another opportunity to add more facts to the complaint." *Macias v. Raul A. (Unknown) Badge No. 153*, 23 F.3d at 97.

Plaintiff has pleaded all the facts necessary to complete an initial review; he need not be afforded an opportunity to amend, because, accepting all of plaintiff's allegations as true, the undersigned concludes, for the reasons stated hereinafter, that his complaint is frivolous.

2. *Parratt/Hudson*

Plaintiff claims that various items of personal property – identification papers, a cassette tape, headphones and personal photographs– were lost or stolen when he was transferred from FPDC to his current place of incarceration.

"To state a claim under § 1983, a plaintiff must allege the violation of a right secured by the Constitution and laws of the United States" *West v. Atkins*, 487 U.S. 42, 48, 108 S.Ct. 2250, 101 L.Ed.2d 40 (1988). Plaintiff's claim implicates the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The Due Process Clause provides "nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law." United States Constitution, Amendment XIV. Here, plaintiff implies that he was deprived of his personal property without due process.

A claim for random deprivation of personal property is not cognizable under §1983. In *Parratt v. Taylor*, 451 U.S. 527, 544, 101 S.Ct. 1908, 68 L.Ed.2d 420 (1981), a prisoner claimed that prison officials had negligently deprived him of his personal property without due process of

law. The Supreme Court held that the prisoner was “deprived” of his property within the meaning of the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, but the Court ruled that the State’s post-deprivation tort remedy provided all the process that was due. *Id.*, 451 U.S. at 536-37, 101 S.Ct. at 1913.

The Due Process Clause does not embrace tort law concepts. Although a litigant may be afforded a remedy under state tort law for deprivation of property, the Fourteenth Amendment does not afford such a remedy. *Daniels v. Williams*, 474 U.S. 327, 335, 106 S.Ct. 662, 667, 88 L.Ed.2d 662 (1986). Even in instances where intentional deprivation occurs, as implied herein, where an adequate state post-deprivation remedy is available, the Due Process Clause is not implicated, so long as the deprivation was “random.” *Hudson v. Palmer*, 468 U.S. 517, 104 S.Ct. 3194, 82 L.Ed.2d 393 (1984); *Davis v. Bayless*, 70 F.3d 367 (5th Cir. 1995); *Murphy v. Collins*, 26 F.3d 541 (5th Cir. 1994).

This principle (known as the *Parratt/Hudson Doctrine*) rests on the premise that because the state is unable to predict random and unauthorized conduct, pre-deprivation remedies are unfeasible. *Davis*, 70 F.3d at 375, citing, *Zinermon v. Burch*, 494 U.S. 113, 128-32, 110 S.Ct. 975, 985-86, 1098 L.Ed.2d 100 (1990) (distinguishing between random unauthorized conduct and a deprivation which results from predictable conduct authorized by a State).

In this case, plaintiff’s allegations, accepted as true for purposes of this evaluation, demonstrate that a random and unauthorized deprivation occurred when plaintiff’s personal property was either lost or stolen. Thus, since plaintiff’s loss was the result of a random and unauthorized deprivation, he is not entitled to relief pursuant to §1983 if adequate state law remedies are available.

Louisiana law provides plaintiff the opportunity to seek redress for either the negligence

or for the intentional torts committed by the defendants. See La. Civil Code article 2315. This provision of state law, which is the general tort provision of Louisiana's Civil Code provides all the process that is required, and thus, the Fourteenth Amendment is not implicated. *Charbonnet v. Lee*, 951 F.2d 638 (5th Cir.), *cert. denied*, 505 U.S. 1205, 112 S.Ct. 2994, 120 L.Ed.2d 871 (1992).

A liberal construction of plaintiff's complaint fails to support a constitutional violation; plaintiff's claim is clearly barred by the *Parratt/Hudson* doctrine. Plaintiff's claim lacks an arguable basis in law and therefore this claim should be dismissed as frivolous.

3. 42 U.S.C. §1997e

Plaintiff also prays for compensatory damages for the "stress and mental anguish" he experienced as a result of the loss of his property and the threats of physical harm which were made by prison guards.

Title 42 U.S.C. § 1997e was amended by the Prison Litigation and Reform Act of 1996. Under the statute, prisoners are barred from recovering monetary damages for mental or emotional injuries "unless there is a prior showing of physical injury." *Crawford-el v. Britton*, 523 U.S. 574, 596, 118 S.Ct. 1584, 140 L.Ed.2d 759 (1998). The "physical injury" required by § 1997e(e) must be more than *de minimis* but need not be significant. *Harper v. Showers*, 174 F.3d 716, 719 (5th Cir.1999) (citing *Siglar v. Hightower*, 112 F.3d 191 (5th Cir.1997))

Plaintiff has alleged no physical injury and the undersigned can imagine no such injury resulting from the facts thus far alleged. Since plaintiff has alleged no physical injury resulting from the actions of the defendant, his claim for monetary damages as compensation for mental anguish and stress is legally without merit and subject to dismissal as frivolous.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

Accordingly,

IT IS RECOMMENDED that plaintiff's civil rights complaint be **DISMISSED WITH PREJUDICE** as frivolous and for failing to state a claim on which relief may be granted in accordance with the provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(i) and (ii).

Under the provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(C) and Fed.R.Civ.Proc. 72(b), parties aggrieved by this recommendation have ten (10) business days from service of this report and recommendation to file specific, written objections with the clerk of court. A party may respond to another party's objections within ten (10) days after being served with a copy thereof.

Failure to file written objections to the proposed factual finding and/or the proposed legal conclusions reflected in this Report and Recommendation within ten (10) days following the date of its service, or within the time frame authorized by Fed.R.Civ.P. 6(b), shall bar an aggrieved party from attacking either the factual findings or the legal conclusions accepted by the District Court, except upon grounds of plain error. See *Douglass v. United Services Automobile Association*, 79 F.3d 1415 (5th Cir. 1996).

In Chambers, Monroe, Louisiana, July 20, 2009.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Karen L. Hayes", is written over a horizontal line.

KAREN L. HAYES
U. S. MAGISTRATE JUDGE